

At Opel plant in Bochum, Germany, Maoists provide key support for union leadership

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Workers at the General Motors-Opel factory in Bochum, Germany, are increasingly angry at the IG Metall trade union and its affiliated joint works council. Union officials have publicly sided with GM-Opel management to enforce the closure of the plant and systematically worked to isolate workers.

Although the head of the Bochum works council, Rainer Einenkel, is on record criticising the joint works council, he has gone to great lengths to block any serious struggle to prevent the closure and defend jobs at the Opel plant.

Many workers are looking for a way to break free from the union straitjacket and take the defence of jobs into their own hands. In this volatile situation, the Maoist “Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany” (MLPD) has jumped to the side of the union leaders to prevent a rebellion against the union. The MLPD has set up its own works council group in Bochum named “Militant Metal”.

The group calls for isolated protests and “wildcat strikes” while at the same time seeking to strengthen the hand of IG Metall, which supports the plant closure. The Maoists encourage reckless and dangerous stunts, on the one hand, that set workers up for victimisation, or, on the other, organise toothless protests that involve blowing whistles and banging drums. Both methods have the result of consolidating the union’s control.

The MLPD is closely linked to the corrupt apparatus of IG Metall through its works councils and shop stewards, and vehemently rejects any rupture with the union.

The latter, however, is the key question. The ruthlessness with which IG Metall supports the closure of the Opel plant in Bochum shows clearly that jobs and wages can only be defended in a struggle against the union. This is what the MLPD seeks to prevent at all costs. It responds to any and every independent mobilisation of the working class with hostility.

This role of the MLPD stems directly from its Stalinist past and outlook. To this day, the group defends Stalin’s crimes. Stalinism was not some sort of minor deviation from the path of socialism, but rather the embodiment of the anti-

communist counter-revolution in the Soviet Union. The Stalinist bureaucracy murdered more revolutionaries and communists than any other regime, the Nazis included. In the 1930s alone, hundreds of thousand of communists fell victim in Stalin’s “Great Purges”.

Stalin represented a privileged bureaucratic caste that seized power in the world’s first workers’ state and defended its interests with brute force against any opposition from below. Stalin rejected the international perspective of Bolshevism and the October Revolution and, under the slogan of “building socialism in one country”, introduced a thoroughly nationalist orientation. The adoption of nationalism by the Communist International led to a series of devastating defeats—including China (1926-1927), Germany (1933) and Spain (1936-1938)—that still hang over the labour movement.

In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, one of Stalin’s successors, made superficial criticisms of some of the worst crimes, while Mao Zedong took over the task of defending Stalin internationally. Based on his support within the peasantry, Mao had earlier assumed the leadership of the Communist Party of China and used Marxist phraseology to garnish his nationalist outlook.

In the revolution of 1949, the Mao leadership was pressured to carry out far-reaching measures against capitalists and land owners, but during the same period systematically suppressed any independent movement of the working class. Unlike the Soviet Union, China never experienced workers’ councils (soviets).

The Stalinist counter-revolution reached its climax in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism in China by the heirs of Stalin and Mao. Regardless of the historical facts, which have been extensively researched and documented, the MLPD continues to the present day to defend Stalin and Stalinism.

Only a few weeks ago, the organisation published a celebratory article to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the death of the dictator, which reads: “The name Stalin (‘Man of Steel’) is inseparably bound up with decades of

socialist construction and profound defeats for imperialism”. The term Stalinism, the MLPD claims, is an “anti-communist battle cry”.

Through its support for Stalinism’s nationalism and its crimes, the MLPD lines up with the most reactionary political forces. Its defence of the unions must be seen in this context. When Opel workers began a discussion about resigning from IG Metall in protest at its support for the factory closure, the MLPD was adamantly opposed. The argument, “IG Metall is doing nothing, now I’m leaving”, was fundamentally wrong, the organisation wrote in a leaflet. Instead, the MLPD called on workers to join the union, asserting that “a good level of organisation” was the most important thing.

The MLPD operates as a thuggish defender of IG Metall, intent on preventing anyone leaving and desperately trying to legitimise the unions. It claims the unions are “basic class organisations” and “fighting organisations” of workers and demands that “militant colleagues” fight within them for “new majorities”.

The development of trade unions all over the world—from the South African National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), to the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the US and IG Metall in Germany—tells a very different story. Their transformation into open stakeholders of big business is a direct result of the trade union perspective based on defending capitalism and the nation-state. This explains why the right wing always emerges victorious in internal union disputes and determines policy.

At the heart of the MLPD’s defence of IG Metall is its agreement with the union’s nationalist programme. Just as it continues to defend Stalin’s conception of “building socialism in one country”, the Maoist group justifies the divide-and-rule strategy of the trade unions, based on playing off one country (or individual factory) against every other. In Stalinist tradition, the organisation hides its nationalism behind platitudes about international solidarity, by which it means alliances with other nationalist and Stalinist organisations.

In an earlier period, when the unions had a different relationship to the working class and retained some support, the Maoists and many other lefts wanted nothing to do with them.

For example, during the long struggle against the closure of the Krupp steel plant in Duisburg-Rheinhausen in 1987-1988, the MLPD rejected any struggle against the IG Metall leadership at a time when the union still exerted a certain influence on workers. Today, when most workers have only contempt for IG Metall, the MLPD has taken root in the union. Only after the complete degeneration of the unions into empty bureaucratic shells in the service of the

corporations and the state did they become appealing to the MLPD. The organisation was magically attracted to the authoritative structure and approach of the corrupt union aristocracy.

The Maoist version of Stalinism was able to win layers of the petty bourgeoisie in many countries in the 1960s. The contempt for the working class on the part of the Maoists won many students who went on to pursue successful careers. The list includes, among many others, José Manuel Barroso (president of the EU Commission), Jürgen Trittin (chairman of the Green parliamentary group), Winfried Kretschmann (premier of Baden-Württemberg), Antje Vollmer (former vice-president of the Bundestag), and last but not least, the chairman of IG Metall, Berthold Huber, who began his rise in the trade union apparatus in the 1970s as a member of the predecessor organisation to the MLPD.

The vilest aspects of Stalinism and Maoism find expression in the MLPD’s political line. It combines verbal radicalism with crass opportunism, pandering to the union bureaucracy and the Left Party. When it talks about “real socialism”, it means the Soviet Union under Stalin, China under Mao and East Germany under Walter Ulbricht.

In Bochum, it currently calls for “strike action like in 2004”, without saying a word about the real events. At that time, workers took spontaneous strike action to prevent the loss of 4,000 jobs. The strike was strangled after less than a week by a sleazy manoeuvre on the part of IG Metall and the works council. The MLPD subsequently supported the election of the works council chairman, Einenkel, under whose administration nearly 7,000 jobs have been lost.

Einenkel has repeatedly argued that the jobs in Bochum could only be saved if workers made concessions and compromises. The result is now well known. Workers must face up to reality. The defence of jobs requires an international socialist perspective, which is diametrically opposed to the nationalist, pro-capitalist orientation of the union and its defenders in the MLPD.



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